

Road to the Future

Understanding the MEd in Teacher-Librarianship at the University of Alberta

Jennifer L. Branch-Mueller (Professor, University of Alberta)

My name is Jennifer Branch-Mueller and I am a professor with responsibilities for teacher-librarianship education in the Department of Elementary Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta.

I am going to tell you a little bit about our program at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. We have a beautiful urban campus that sits at the edge of a long river that runs through the middle of the campus. I am very lucky to work in a large, research-intensive university. See at right for a photo of the campus.



The University of Alberta has 17 faculties with about 45,000 students. There are about 5,000 students in the Faculty of Education including undergraduate students working towards a Bachelor of Education degree and graduate students in different programs in the Department of Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Educational Policy Studies, Educational Psychology, and the School of Library and Information studies.

Unlike Japan, in Canada there is no national certification for teacher-librarians. We have different ways of becoming a teacher-librarian including:

1. MLIS (American Library Association accredited programs)
2. Master of Education (with a focus on teacher-librarianship)
3. Diploma in Teacher-Librarianship
4. School Library Specialist Certification

While there are seven ALA-accredited MLIS programs in Canada, none of them have permanent faculty members in the area of teacher-librarianship and none of the university programs have any specific programming for teacher-librarians. There is only one Master of Education degree with a focus on teacher-librarianship (at the University of Alberta) and only one diploma program (at the University of British Columbia). There are different options for teachers in Ontario (and beyond) who want to become School Library Specialists. These courses are not “university credit” courses but, rather, they are continuing profes-

sional learning courses offered by school districts or universities. Most teacher-librarians in Ontario (the most populous province) would have this continuing professional learning certification.

The Master of Education program at the University of Alberta is fully online and requires students to complete ten graduate-level courses. Each course is worth three credits and is 39-42 hours of instruction in one term (Fall, Winter, Spring, or Summer). Each course costs about \$1,200 and we ensure that books are less than \$100 and some courses have no textbooks at all but, instead, use research and professional articles available from the University of Alberta Library databases such as Library and Information Science Source and Proquest Education Database.

The Master of Education program has two required courses. The first course is a foundational curriculum course that looks at both historical and contemporary issues in curriculum. The second course is an introduction to educational research, focuses on helping students become critical consumers of educational research and the major assignment is a literature review on a topic of the student's choice. Students then choose eight elective courses to complete their degree. As the advisor for all students interested in teacher-librarianship in the program, I work with students to plan their program to meet their specific learning needs. There is no required practicum experience in a school library. This would not be possible for our students as they are all working full-time in teaching or teacher-librarian positions.

Most of our students apply to our program when they are already working in a school library. Often, their principal has recommended that they move into a teacher-librarianship role and so they then apply to the program to learn more about what a teacher-librarian actually does. Many students are referred to our program by someone who is in our program or is a graduate of our program.

Students need to have a minimum B (3.0) average in their last 60 credits, a Bachelor of Education degree, and a minimum of one year of teaching experience. Most of them will have been teaching for at least five years but we also have students who have more than ten or even twenty years of teaching experience. Prospective students are required to submit a statement of intent indicating what they hope to learn in a Master of Education program. We also require three letters of reference from administrators, previous academic instructors, or school district leaders.

Our students come from across Canada and most of them are Canadian citizens. Tuition rates for International students are the same as for Canadian students. We also have students who are working in International schools as teachers and teacher-librarians. All of our students continue to work full-time while in the program and they take one online course each term. We offer courses in fall (September to December), Winter (January to April), Spring (May and June), and Summer (July and August). The courses in spring and summer are condensed (six week courses rather than 13 week courses). Most students complete their Master

of Education degree in about three years, but the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research allows students up to six years to complete. Many of our students never come to campus. Although we do hope they will come for convocation ceremonies when they complete their degree and receive their diploma.

We currently have about 20 students enrolled in the teacher-librarianship focus but there are more than 150 students in our Master of Education program and about 30 students in our doctoral program. More than 50 students have graduated in the last five years with a Master of Education degree with a focus on teacher-librarianship. We have only one full-time, tenured, faculty member in teacher-librarianship, so we rely on sessional instructors to also teach in the program. We have had four sessional instructors teaching in the program in recent years - Dr. Dianne Oberg (Professor Emerita and former Chair of the Department of Elementary Education), Dr. Joanne Rodger (Adjunct Professor and Curriculum Specialist in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry), Dr. Lois Barranoik (retired teacher-librarian) and Lissa Davies (graduate of our program, former teacher-librarian and now, school district consultant for Edmonton Public Schools). Drs. Oberg, Rodger, and Barranoik all have MLIS degrees as well as PhDs with a focus on school and/or public libraries. We have no international faculty members.

In our courses specifically for teachers-librarians, small group discussions (or the graduate seminar model) are the norm. For each discussion, students are required to post a starting message (a scholarly contribution) and are assessed using the following rubric.

Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
<p>A creative, thoughtful, well-written, scholarly contribution that synthesizes assigned readings.</p> <p>(6 points)</p>	<p>A well-written scholarly contribution that synthesizes most assigned readings.</p> <p>(5 points)</p>	<p>The scholarly contribution meets an acceptable level but may not be well synthesized, may not synthesize all assigned readings, or may have grammatical and/or style errors.</p> <p>(4 points)</p>	<p>Scholarly contribution is incomplete, not synthesized, and/or does not meet an acceptable level.</p> <p>(2 points)</p>
<p>The contribution presents unique ideas, examples from all of the readings/resources plus further research (e.g. new research, practical examples, provincial documents, professional articles), and engaging connections to personal/professional experiences.</p> <p>(6 points)</p>	<p>The contribution presents engaging ideas and examples from all assigned readings/resources, and makes clear connections to personal and professional experiences.</p> <p>(5 points)</p>	<p>The contribution presents ideas from some or all of the assigned readings and makes some connections to personal and professional experiences.</p> <p>(4 points)</p>	<p>It may be incomplete and/or does not demonstrate understanding of the assigned readings.</p> <p>(2 points)</p>
<p>The contribution invites others to make connections based on the metaphor and/or engaging personal/professional experiences and poses thoughtful questions to extend and enhance the discussion.</p> <p>(4 points)</p>	<p>The contribution is clear and ideas/experiences presented provide several ways to engage and extend the discussion. Questions for group discussion are included.</p> <p>(3 points)</p>	<p>The contribution is clear but it might not be easy to make connections and extend the discussion and/or does not include questions for consideration.</p> <p>(2 points)</p>	<p>The contribution discourages further discussion.</p> <p>(1 point)</p>

The contribution keeps to the assigned word limit and includes correct in-text citations with all references correctly cited in APA style. (4 points)	The contribution may be a little too long or too short long (50 words), may be missing citations to some sources and/or has a few errors in APA citation and references. (3 points)	The contribution does not keep to the assigned word limit (more than 100 words), is missing citations and/or has many errors in APA citation and referencing. (2 points)	The contribution does not have proper APA citation and references. (1 point)
---	---	--	--

Since small group discussions are very important, we assess engagement in discussions at mid-term and at the end of each course. Usually discussion engagement is worth about 25% of the final course grade. We use the following rubric to assess discussion engagement.

Criteria	Performance Indicators			
	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Presence (Value = 16)	Maintains a consistent and valuable presence in the conversational flow of the discussion over three days. Fully engaged with each group member to share resources, celebrate, elaborate, and encourage contributions of other participants. Wraps up discussion with important takeaways and insightful further questions. 14-16	Maintains a consistent presence in the conversational flow of the discussion. Engages regularly with each group member and responds to the flow of discussions in a timely way. 11-13	Maintains a presence in the conversational flow of the discussion. May only engage once with each group member and/or may not respond in a timely way. 9-10	Does not maintain a presence in the conversational flow of the discussion. Does not engage with group members or responds in ways that are off-topic, poorly paced, or discouraging to broader participation. Does not wrap up discussion with takeaways and further questions. 0-8
Response to Others (Value = 17)	Consistently follows discussion threads and raises the discussion to new levels with creative and original interventions, and/or starts new discussions that carry the discourse. 14-17	Provides original thoughts and inspirations relative to topics of individual interest or expertise. 11-13	Responses are appropriate but do not raise the level of discussion. May share personal expertise or interest. 9-10	Responses are simplistic and echo contributions of others. Does not respond to others. 0-8
Integration and synthesis of concepts and principles (Value = 17)	Course materials, as well as additional research and professional articles, social media issues and ideas, webinars, videos, etc. are shared in almost every post to support understanding and responses reflect a deep understanding of fundamental principles. 14-17	Course material is usually referred to, when appropriate, and responses reflect an understanding of fundamental principles. Shares one or two new resources per discussion to support and enhance learning. 11-13	Course material is sometimes referred to and responses reflect an understanding of fundamental principles. Rarely shares additional resources to support and enhance learning. 9-10	Course material is never or rarely referred to in responses but there is a basic understanding of fundamental principles. Does not share additional resources to support and enhance learning. 0-8

Most courses also include group projects where teams of students engage in creating virtual presentations/seminars/webinars that they share with the rest of the class. This can be done in groups of two, three or four. Each course also requires individual written assignments that can take the form of:

- Action plans
- Case Studies
- Issue Papers
- Article for a Professional Journal
- Book chapter

We also use the popular National Public Radio *This I Believe*... (<https://www.npr.org/series/4538138/this-i-believe>) as a way for students to write about their new understandings after taking a course.

In our Introduction to the Teacher-Librarianship course, we ask students to complete an evaluation of a school library using the work of Nancy Everhart (*Evaluating the School Library Media Centre*) as a starting point and then also using *Achieving Information Literacy: Standards for School Library Programs in Canada* and *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*. In this assignment, students spend time in a school library that is not their own examining policies, practices, collections, facilities, and speaking directly with a teacher-librarian about their programs.

In our Inquiry-based Teaching and Learning course, we ask students to create an action plan based on a chosen scenario. In each scenario, students are asked to take on a certain role (teacher, parent, teacher-librarian, administrator, superintendent) and work together to find common ground on building a culture of inquiry in a given context. This action plan includes creating a website with resources as well as providing supporting documentation about a new initiative that will be rolled out in the school or district. Students create letters for parents, professional development learning goals, and short videos.

In our Emerging Technologies course, students use different technologies to share their reading and thinking each week. We highlight Podcasts, Blogs, Cartoon Creators, Timeline creators, Twitter Chats, etc.

In our culminating course, Leadership in Teacher-Librarianship, students write a book chapter on a topic of personal interest. These chapters are peer-edited, and then compiled into an e-Book made available freely to all (see <https://sites.google.com/a/ualberta.ca/2015-becoming-and-being/>). All together we have over 60 chapters in the three volumes that we have published.

Our program for teacher-librarians focuses on the leadership role of the teacher-librarian. We spend time talking and reading about the different styles of leadership and the dispositions of effective teacher-librarians (see Jones & Bush, 2009; Kimmel, Dickinson, & Doll, 2012). We focus on leadership in technology, inquiry, resources, and multiple literacies. Our graduates go on to be leaders in their schools and school districts. Several of our graduates have moved into ad-

ministrative positions as assistant principals, as well.

Education is a provincial matter in Canada so expectations and regulations are different between jurisdictions. In Alberta, for example, there are no minimum staffing levels or even qualifications for positions. As a result, school libraries might be open only part-time and might have a qualified teacher-librarian, a teacher, a library technician, a library assistant, an educational assistant (with no library training at all), or other unqualified staff or even parent volunteers. In British Columbia, on the other hand, there are some provincial regulations about staffing levels based on the number of students in a school. Qualifications for these positions might be different across school districts with some requiring teachers in the library to have one or two courses in teacher-librarianship or to register in a program. In other provinces, there might not be a single qualified teacher-librarian working in a school library. The Library Learning Commons model has been taken up in some districts but the messaging has not included the need for qualified teacher-librarians and, as a result, there are spaces with couches, coffee makers, and computers but little or no instruction and programming.

Many schools in Canada used site-based decision-making, meaning that administrators determine if and how to staff school libraries. Without provincial standards and regulations, this can mean that when cuts are made, teacher-librarians can and are moved out of the school library and back into classrooms. Alternatively, the time spent in the library can be cut so that teacher-librarians are spending only an hour or two each day in a school library.

References

- Asselin, M., Branch, J. L., & Oberg, D. (Eds.), (2003). *Achieving information literacy: Standards for school library programs in Canada*. Canadian School Library Association and the Association for Teacher Librarianship in Canada. <http://accessola2.com/SLIC-Site/slic/ail110217.pdf>
- Canadian Library Association. (2014). *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*. Author. <https://llsop.canadianschoollibraries.ca/>
- Everhart, N. (1998). *Evaluating the school library media center: Analysis techniques and research practices*. Libraries Unlimited.
- Jones, J., & Bush, G. (2009). What defines an exemplary school librarian: An exploration of professional dispositions. *Library Media Connection*, 27(6), 28-30.
- Kimmel, S. C., Dickinson, G. K., & Doll, C. A. (2012). Dispositions in the twenty-first century school library profession. *School Libraries Worldwide*, 18(2).

This paper is based on a presentation given in the symposium “Road to the Future: School and Children’s Librarianship 子どものための図書館サービス専門職養成の国際動向” held on August 4, 2019 in Sapporo, Japan.

Acknowledgement. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP18K02592.